



## Office of U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow

# In Focus: Northern Border Security

The 4,000-mile border between the United States and Canada is one of the most peaceful and open in the world. Ironically, that has also made our northern border less secure.

Terrorists see the ease with which commerce and culture flow between the United States and Canada and they see an easy way to unlawfully enter our country and stage an attack.

I have been concerned about this for some time. Even before the attack of Sept. 11, there were warnings. In December 1999, Ahmed Ressam, a terrorist trained in Osama bin Laden's Afghanistan camps, was arrested shortly after crossing the border between Canada and Washington state. In the trunk of his car were explosives and other bomb-making materials.

Ressam later confessed his plans to attack a variety of targets in the United States, including the Seattle Space Needle and Los Angeles Airport, as part of a wider plan to attack America during the millennium celebrations.

At about the same time, others with terrorist ties were arrested crossing from Canada into Vermont.

Now, with the attack of Sept. 11, we realize more than ever that we have to take these threats seriously. We need to strengthen security along our northern border, without stifling trade or tourism because Canada is vital to our economic security as well.

Over \$1.4 billion worth of goods and services cross the northern border every day. This constitutes the largest bilateral flow of goods, services, and capital between two countries anywhere in the world.

And Michigan receives more of this trade than any other state. Among ports of entry between Canada and the United States, four of the seven busiest ports of entry are between the Michigan-Canadian borders. In fact, the Ambassador Bridge in Detroit is the most heavily traveled bridge on the U.S.-Canadian border.

Before the attacks of September 11th, our northern border was already severely under-funded and understaffed. Our Customs officers on the northern border process 63 percent of all trucks, 85 percent of all trains and 23 percent of all passengers and pedestrians entering the country each year.

However, our Customs inspectors represent only 14 percent of the inspection force, even though the northern border is twice as long as our border with Mexico. According to the Canadian/American Border Trade Alliance, at any given time half of the existing processing lanes on the U.S.-Canadian border remain closed due to understaffing of U.S. Customs and INS inspectors.

The events of September 11th have aggravated this already critical situation. Delays at the border were running two hours or more. This meant that factories and businesses that depend on just-in-time inventory delivery were idled as they waited for parts. Medical facilities had to operate short staffed because many nurses and other health care workers were stuck in long lines. Police and sheriff's deputies from across Michigan volunteered to be deputized as INS

inspectors to try and ease the staffing crisis. But these officers all have other crucial duties in the communities they serve and cannot be used for border inspections indefinitely.

The inspectors and agents on our borders are our first line of defense. We cannot expect them to do this job well if they are short-staffed, overworked and technologically behind.

I have been working both to ease the short-term crisis, while looking for long-term solutions to this problem that threatens both our national and economic security.

#### **Upcoming Initiatives:**

- I have been working with my colleagues to hire more INS and Customs staff at our northern border crossings. Senator Levin and I were original proponents of the Northern Border Hiring Initiative, which was signed into law and will provide 308 new officers for the northern border, with 97 assigned to Michigan.
- I have also suggested creating a reverse inspection pilot program to station U.S. inspectors in Windsor, Sarnia, and Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. Canadian inspectors would then be stationed in Detroit, Port Huron, and Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. By having people go through checkpoints before they cross the border, we can eliminate potential threats to our bridges and tunnels.
- I am very pleased that the Senate passed the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act, which strengthens security at our borders and improves the visa entry process to enhance our homeland security. This legislation addresses the most glaring needs at U.S. borders, ultimately putting 1,000 new INS inspectors on the job. It also provides \$150 million to improve and expand INS technology and allows for regular anti-terrorism training for agents working at the border. This bill also makes much-needed improvements in the monitoring requirements for foreign students, requiring for the first time the recording of important information such as students' date of arrival into the U.S. and graduation from school.

#### **Among the things we have already accomplished in the Senate are:**

**Anti-terrorism bill:** The Uniting and Strengthening America Act, (USA Act), signed into law by President Bush on Oct. 26, contains several provisions to dramatically improve border security. With my northern border colleagues, I worked successfully to triple the number of Border Patrol, Customs Service and INS inspectors at the northern border. The bill also authorizes \$100 million to improve INS and Customs technology and purchase additional equipment for monitoring the U.S./Canadian border. The legislation also included provisions to require the Attorney General, in consultation with appropriate agencies, to develop technical standards for an integrated automated fingerprint identification system for points of entry and overseas consular posts.

**Help where it's needed most:** The Senate Commerce-State-Justice Appropriations bill for FY 2002 provides \$25 million for 348 additional border inspectors to be deployed at the most understaffed ports of entry. The bill specified that the Detroit Bridge/Tunnel is the most understaffed - by 151 - of all the ports listed in the bill.

**Staffing and Training:** The new Treasury-Postal Appropriations, approved by the House and Senate, provides \$28 million for the Northern Border Staffing Initiative, including \$2 million for the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center. This money will go to train additional Customs staff, and also hire about 285 additional Customs officers on the Northern Border.

**Deploying the National Guard:** On Nov. 5, the Administration announced that about \$2.3 million would be used to support 100 state-activated National Guard troops for three months to enhance security and expedite U.S. Customs Service checks at the U.S.-Canadian ports of entry in Michigan.

**U.S./Canadian Cooperation:** On Dec. 3, Attorney General John Ashcroft came to Detroit to announce a U.S./Canadian agreement to help safeguard the northern border. The agreement includes posting about 600 National Guard troops at U.S. border posts to assist Customs and INS for up to another year. Our two nations have also agreed to coordinate visa policies to prevent people refused a visa by one country from applying to go to the other. We also jointly agreed to increase immigration officers overseas, have U.S. and Canadian officials jointly analyze passenger lists at key airports and develop new border technology.

Besides these specific pieces of legislation, I have been working with the Administration and Canadian officials directly in hearings and meetings to urge them to take sustained action now so we can protect both our economic and national security far into the future.

By jointly improving security along our border with Canada, we show the rest of the world that free nations can battle terrorism, while still preserving their mutual friendship and prosperity.